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NEVADA APPEAL BEST OF CARSON CITY 2018



Mrs. Bob Cratchit's Wild Christmas Binge takes aim at one of the most earnest, goodhearted stories in the holiday canon.
 PHOTO/ERIC MARKS

Cheers and jeers

Mrs. Bob Cratchit's Wild Christmas Binge

Was November's 30-day social media gorge on gratitude too much to swallow? Are the thousands of saccharine sweet holiday movies—already on repeat since October—giving you heartburn? You could probably use something a bit saltier. *Mrs. Bob Cratchit's Wild Christmas Binge* is just the ticket.

In *Binge*, Good Luck Macbeth's current production, playwright Christopher Durang, whose reputation has been built on parodying such unfunny plays as *The Seagull* and *The Glass Menagerie*, takes aim at one of the most earnest, goodhearted stories in the holiday canon, Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*. But don't let the background handbells provided by Good Shepard Lutheran Church fool you: There's not a warm fuzzy in sight.

As the story's past-present-future ghost (Annalize Sanders) explains, yes, we are about to go on a journey to reverse Ebenezer Scrooge's bah-humbugging ways. But things don't quite work out as planned. Scrooge (Kevin McCray) is as abusive as ever to his lowly assistant, Bob Cratchit (Robert Simpson). But Durang's Bob is pathetic, stupidly cheerful and weak. When two gentlemen (played by Ryan Costello and Jasper Allen Unger IV) come calling, not to solicit donations for the poor but to convince Scrooge to purchase "energy units" in a sort of Enron-like pyramid scheme, Scrooge announces to Bob that henceforth, the poor man's salary would be cut in half to free up funds for energy units.

It's just after this point where the story goes hilariously awry. Scrooge is visited by our ghost, whose time-travel abilities go kaplooe, and Scrooge's story takes a backseat. Instead, we spend an inordinate amount of time with the Cratchits, whose house is a hot mess. Do-gooder Bob keeps bringing home stray children for the

missus, Gladys Cratchit (Stacy Johnson), to care for, yet they can't feed the 20-plus kids they already have. Then there's Tiny Tim (Mackenzie Hamel), who relishes the opportunity to become even more pitiful. That's it, Gladys says, I'm outta here. And off she goes to get drunk and throw herself off the London Bridge.

Scrooge is oddly taken by Gladys, but the ghost's repeated attempts to show him happier moments fail miserably with her malfunctioning wand, giving Durang the opportunity to skewer other sacred Christmas chestnuts, from "The Gift of the Magi" to *It's a Wonderful Life*, even throwing more of Dickens' fuel on the fire with *Oliver Twist* and *The Old Curiosity Shop*. We're all just along for the ride as the scenes change at a frenetic pace. There's no point trying to keep up. Just give in and enjoy the madness. Before long we're dropped into references only audiences of a certain age will get, and the whole thing starts feeling like a big inside joke. Leona Helmsley? Sure, why not.

Johnson's deadpan Gladys is brilliant and hilarious throughout, and I'd be remiss if I didn't call out Ryan Costello and Amanda Alvey's Mr. and Mrs. Fezziwig as the funniest thing I've seen in months. The cast capably maneuvers their multiple roles—up to four each—and abrupt scene changes, all while keeping us happily amused, although Durang's bizarre scripting frequently runs off the rails.

Don't expect a cohesive, family-friendly story, and for god's sake don't expect a moral. Put down that cup of Christmas cheer for a bit, and go do a shot with Mrs. Cratchit. □

Mrs. Bob Cratchit's Wild Christmas Binge



Good Luck Macbeth Theatre Company, 124 W. Taylor St., presents *Mrs. Bob Cratchit's Wild Christmas Binge* by Christopher Durang with music by Michael Friedman, directed by Jamie Woodham, on Dec. 5, 6, 7, 12, 13, 14, 18, 19, 20, 21 at 7:30 p.m.; and Dec. 8, 15 at 2 p.m. Tickets are \$18 in advance, \$20 at the door, and \$30 for VIP Champagne seating. Purchase at www.goodluckmacbeth.org or by calling 322-3716.